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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 6281
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4326
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3147
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9904
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 3241
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0342
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2318
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6834
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4697
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001439

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: JOINT CHIEF OF STAFF CHAIRMAN CLAIMS
'BREATHING SPACE' WOULD ALLOW LTTE TO STRENGTHEN

REF: COLOMBO 1433 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CDA James R. Moore for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Charge' met with Ministry of Defense (MOD) Chief of Defense Staff General Donald Perera on August 31 to reiterate that the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) should take the lead in stopping military action to provide "breathing space" for the GSL and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in order to reconsider a political way forward. Charge' further indicated that U.S. military to military support would be contingent on the security forces' human rights record. Perera responded that the GSL would not pursue a ceasefire unless the LTTE guarantees it will not use the period to increase the strength of its military forces, and denied security forces' culpability in a high profile human rights case (reftels). Perera was optimistic that the security forces would neutralize the LTTE threat on Trincomalee Harbor and the troop and supply route to Jaffna Peninsula. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During an August 31 meeting with Chief of Defense Staff General Donald Perera, Charge' reiterated the US call for a cessation of hostilities between the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tami Eelam (LTTE). Charge' pointed out that the onus is on the GSL as a legitimate, democratically elected government to make the first gesture in the path back toward talks, to which Perera answered: "The security forces can't give up arms. The terrorists have to give up arms. If we stop, they will strengthen again." While stressing our initiatives to combat LTTE terrorism, such as listing the LTTE as an FTO, FBI arrests, and formation of a counterterrorism contact group (reftels), Charge' argued: "There is more support for the LTTE than there should be due to the lack of sufficient efforts by the GSL to bring Tamils into the political and economic mainstream." Perera responded that the "LTTE has never been a genuine party in the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA)" and that "the GSL has no faith" in what the LTTE says, adding, "when the enemy is weak, it needs to be put down hard."

¶3. (C) Charge' noted that the US and GSL have a healthy military to military relationship, with important new

projects in the works, including a major maritime surveillance project. With greater military cooperation, explained Charge', comes greater scrutiny for the protection of human rights. Charge' brought up the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission's (SLMM) recent assessment (ref A) that security forces may have been involved in the August 4 murder of 17 local staff members of a French NGO in Muttur, stating that the US has called for a full and transparent international investigation into the killings. Perera responded that nothing in the GSL-led investigation so far points to the security forces' involvement, and that he could not comment on the departure of the Australian team invited by the GSL to participate in the investigation (ref A).

14. (C) General Perera commended the security forces' "defensive" operation in the Trincomalee-Muttur-Sampur area in northeastern Sri Lanka, stating the operation would continue until LTTE artillery guns are neutralized, but that the military already had a clear advantage. Perera argued, "The LTTE needs to choke supplies from Trincomalee in order to take Jaffna." Outgoing SLMM chief Ulf Henricsson agreed that the LTTE's objective from its Sampur bases is to cut supply routes to Jaffna and in the long run take it over, but told co-chairs representatives on August 31 that "the LTTE has performed better (in the east) if you compare resources on paper. GSL forces are inefficient and not motivated."

15. (C) Comment: Another appeal to the GSL for breathing space and human rights accountability seems to have fallen on deaf ears. Yesterday's meeting with General Perera confirms our perception that the military is calling the shots politically and has no clear exit strategy from the current

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escalation of hostilities. End Comment.
MOORE